

9th Annual President's Day Cave Conservation Weekend Oregon Caves National Monument Feb 18-19, 2012



Dean and Parker
clean the Paradise
Lost pools

Participants

Cascade Grotto

John Darby
Gretchen Huning
Dean Lambert
Parker Lambert
Hester Mallonée
Robert Mitchell
James Mooreshire

High Desert Grotto

Kevin Branscum
Wade Garrett
Neil Marchington
Genevieve Mattar

Willamette Valley Grotto

Chris Molyneux
Steve Wade "Swade"

National Park Service

Elizabeth Hale
John Roth

Another successful event! The volunteer cleanup event draws Pacific Northwest cavers from three grottos

Thirteen cavers representing three grottos in Washington and Oregon traveled to Oregon Caves for President's Day Weekend to spend the coldest weekend of winter volunteering on cave restoration projects.

Oregon Caves benefitted from the collective experience and enthusiasm of the crew. The weekend resulted in significant lint reduction at Paradise Lost, restoration of the pool next to Niagara Falls, progress on rimstone

reconstruction, and a start on removal of the "red abomination" in the Souvenir Room.

On Sunday the cavers were treated to an off-trail caving trip to the south end of the cave led by resource managers John Roth and Elizabeth Hale. The group enjoyed a rare opportunity to view ancient bear claw marks that are "preserved" in clay sediment.

**Thanks to all the volunteers who made
a difference this weekend! -Elizabeth**

How the weekend was organized

Earlier in the week Elizabeth staged 5-gallon buckets below drip points in the Ghost Room, Paradise Lost, and near the Grand Column to collect cave water for cleaning.

After Saturday morning briefing, Elizabeth oriented volunteers to the four work sites in the cave: 1) pool next to Niagara Falls – pool bottom completely coated with sediment tracked in from visitors' shoes, 2) rimstone room – long-term project to reconstruct damaged rimstone from

salvaged pieces of the formation, 3) Paradise Lost – a dome pit with significant lint buildup, and 4) Souvenir Room – remnant of cement work from an earlier era leaching a red color (and possibly chemical) into the surrounding water and sediment.

The Ghost Room served as HQ. Buckets of restoration supplies and a bin of safety equipment were located on the platform. Neil led the Paradise Lost cleanup efforts. Hester presided over the rimstone room. Robert organized group meals.



"In case you can't tell, I'm
smiling." Swade mixes cement for
rimstone repair work



On rope below Paradise Lost, Kevin safely reaches the "hard-to-reach" lint

Significant improvement in the condition of the pool at Niagara Falls and at Paradise Lost

Working as a team, Swade and Chris successfully cleaned the human-tracked debris out of the pool next to Niagara Falls. By Saturday afternoon they exposed the rock of the pool bottom.

Working just as efficiently, Neil rigged Paradise Lost ready for three cavers to go on rope after lunch on Saturday. The cavers were able to reach epic-size deposits of lint in hard-to-reach places and discover a rat nest composed of the lint filter used in the tray-and-tarp set up on the stairs, which was cleaned up.

At the top of Paradise Lost, the formations were sprayed and lint-picked with tweezers. On Sunday morning Dean and his son Parker used brushes in the Paradise Lost

pools to remove lint, hair, and eventually surprises such as broken glass from the impressive buildup of "muck" in those pools.

Spraying water from hand-pump bottle and the backpack sprayer, large amounts of lint were able to be washed down to the pit, accessible from the Ghost Room floor. Volunteers spent several hours collecting lint from the pit with tweezers. The lint bags grew heavy and musings were rampant about "the stony navel."

Chipping away the "red abomination"

The red cement used in a bygone era of the cave's history is well known to all who have participated in any restoration work in Oregon Caves. Remains of it can be seen from the tour path at Miller's Chapel, but most appallingly in the Souvenir Room, where blood-colored water pools up in the wet season.

A strategy for removal of the red cement in the Souvenir Room was discussed on a planning walk-thru with cavers at the 2010 President's Day Cave Cleanup Event. This year we moved forward on it.

On Saturday John and Gretchen did the preliminary work of finding the extent of the red cement and worked with steel brushes, hand trowels, and other light-use hand tools. They discovered the cement was attached to a single large piece of loose bedrock.

On Sunday Chris and Robert applied rock hammers and a flat head screwdriver to the task of removing the cement. As they carefully removed cement in flakes, they occasionally encountered pockets of red "goo" as if paint. Cement chipped away filled over a bucket. Follow up work at this site will be needed to complete the removal and restore the site to a natural appearance.



John and Gretchen excavated the extent of the "red abomination" on Saturday. The next day Robert (not pictured) and Chris made careful progress removing it with rock hammers.